DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 437 110 JC 000 071

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TITLE	Writing-Across-the-Curriculum at Union County College.
PUB DATE	1999-07-00
NOTE	18p.; In: Issues of Education at Community Colleges: Essays by Fellows in the Mid-Career Fellowship Program at Princeton University, 1998-1999; see JC 000 068.
PUB TYPE	Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Community Colleges; Educational Needs; Program Design; Program Development; *Teacher Attitudes; *Teaching Methods; Two Year Colleges; *Writing Across the Curriculum; Writing Assignments; *Writing Instruction; Writing Skills; *Writing Strategies; Writing Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	*Union County College NJ

ABSTRACT

This paper offers a model for Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC), for faculty and students at Union County College (UCC). The paper summarizes the history of WAC at UCC, which was introduced at the college in 1978, but did not become institutionalized. It also explores faculty views on the teaching of writing and the role of writing in the classroom by conducting a survey, the results of which are appended in this paper. The study particularly focuses on how faculty in disciplines other than English felt about the teaching of writing, and compares surveys of English with non-English faculty. Results show that there is a community of faculty at UCC willing to begin a dialogue to address the problems of poor student writing and faculty preparedness to teach writing. The paper asserts that for the WAC program to be successful at UCC, it must have these components: (1) writing intensive courses in the disciplines which outline the specific goals of the courses; (2) faculty workshops where faculty come together to write and discuss pedagogy; (3) a committee which oversees the evaluations of writing intensive courses and faculty workshops; (4) a Writing Center which supports faculty efforts to integrate writing into their courses; and (5) a newsletter which can communicate/share the successes of WAC with the faculty and the college community. (VWC)

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Writing-Across-the-Curriculum at Union County College

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Fall 1998 - Spring 1999

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I. Introduction

Writing-Across-the-Curriculum (WAC) became popular in American colleges and universities in the mid 1970's in response to a perceived deficiency in students' thinking and writing skills. WAC functions on two governing principles: 1.) writing to improve thinking and writing skills, and 2.) writing as a learning tool. For WAC, writing does not simply mean writing for a grade. All kinds of writing can take place in a writing intensive course such as, note-taking, making lists, journal writing, short response writing, and essays, and these assignments can be graded or ungraded.

In the twenty-five years since WAC was introduced to U.S. educators, there have been many colleges and universities which have been able to sustain their WAC programs while other programs have failed inspite of a promising start. Since Union County College belongs to the latter group, this paper will offer a model for Writing-Across-the-Curriculum which will be meaningful for faculty and students at Union County College.

II. The History of WAC at UCC

A. In the Summer of 1978, Karl Oelke, a senior Professor in the English Department at Union County College, ran a series of Writing Across

the Curriculum workshops at UCC. These workshops were the results of several WAC workshops he had attended earlier that year. By having these workshops, Karl hoped to begin a WAC movement at UCC. The two workshops ran for three summers with 25% - 30% of the faculty sharing ideas and discussing ways for using writing as a learning tool.

After ten years, there were enough faculty involved in the workshops, and many of them were using writing in their courses, so in the Spring of 1988 an adhoc committee was sent up to draft a Writing Across the Curriculum policy. The policy was eventually approved at a full-faculty meeting, and it went into effect in the Fall 1988. The written policy became apart of the 1988-89 UCC faculty and student handbooks. In the faculty handbook the policy stressed the importance of writing in the academic lives of students at Union County College. It read,

> "Writing to learn as well as writing for a grade will be components of courses in every discipline and faculty members will insure that students' passing grades in courses where writing is in any way appropriate will reflect their ability to express themselves clearly and correctly in writing" (Copy of the written policy sent from Karl Oelke to Dean Wynn Phillips for the 1988-89 UCC Faculty Handbook).

In the 1988-89 UCC Student Handbook, there was a general statement on writing which identifies the different reasons why students write (i.e. to remind yourself of something, to sort things out, to convey information or

ideas, etc) and the different forms of writing (i.e. notes, lists, letters, college papers and reports). However, the WAC policy for students was not as specific as it had been illustrated to faculty. The student policy reads, "At Union County College, you'll discover two kinds of writing, Writing to Learn and Writing for Publication" (pg. 15).

Now, some twenty-one years after the first WAC workshop at UCC and eleven years since the faculty approved the Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Policy, there is little evidence that WAC as a college-wide movement existed at all. The written policy that was once apart of the 1988-1989 UCC Student and Faculty Handbooks has not been included in the handbooks since. In terms of the faculty's commitment to WAC in the classroom, I am sure that there are some faculty in other disciplines who have students do some form of writing in their courses; however, whether a majority of the faculty are doing it is questionable. When I interviewed Karl even he questioned whether the policy had a serious impact in the classroom or on the curriculum at UCC. Nowadays when asked by other departments, Karl gives workshops to various departments, showing non-English faculty how to respond to students' writing; however, there is no campus-wide effort for WAC.

There are probably several reasons why WAC at Union County College lost its momentum. It might have helped for the WAC Policy to identify more specific requirements in terms of the amount of writing students were expected to produce. Another problem might have been the lack of follow-ups workshops, and a lack of dialogue between the faculty in terms of what was happening in the writing intensive courses. In the WAC policy at UCC the responsibility for implementation was left up to each department which is the way it should be; however, the departments neither specified guidelines nor set up a method for evaluating writing intensive courses.

III. Faculty Views on the Teaching of Writing

Before proposing a model for Writing-Across-the-Curriculum, I wanted to find out how the faculty at Union County College view the teaching of writing and the role of writing in the classroom. To gain some insight in these areas, I conducted a survey in the Spring 1999 similar to a survey given at Tarrant County Junior College in Texas. Sixty-two faculty members at Union County College participated in the survey. Thirty-seven are full-time faculty and twenty-five are adjunct faculty. Twenty-eight of the sixty-two faculty surveyed teach English ranging from developmental, ESL (English as a

Second Language), and traditional English (i.e. Composition and Literature). Thirty-four of the faculty who participated in the survey teach in the Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Nursing, Continuing Education, Math, Business, History, and the Psychology/Sociology Departments.

Overall, the faculty had very positive responses to the survey (see Appendix 1). Ninety-three percent of the faculty agreed to the statement, "Writing is applicable to my field of instruction". Sixty-two percent of the faculty agreed writing should be taught in any and all classes. On the surveys, some faculty commented on the ambiguity of the word "taught"; however, by this I meant taught as either explaining how to write or assigning writing. One does not necessarily have to know how to teach the mechanics of grammar and composition in order to teach a writing intensive course. Many of the faculty are aware of this which probably explains why eight-two percent of the faculty agreed that there is a difference between using writing and teaching writing. Seventy-six percent of the faculty agreed that poor student writing is a problem in their classes, and eight-one percent agreed to the statement, "writing in my class would be time well spent."

Since I was particularly interested in how faculty in disciplines other than English, felt about the teaching of writing, I decided to compare the

surveys of English faculty with non-English faculty (see Appendix 2). The results of this comparison, although not surprising, proved to be insightful.

Eighty percent of the English faculty agreed writing should be taught in any and all classes while only fifty-eight percent of non-English faculty agreed. Ninety-six percent of English faculty agreed that writing in their classes would be time well spent while only sixty-nine percent of non-English faculty agreed. Even more interesting are the responses to faculty preparedness and their perceptions of student writing skills. Ninety-six percent of the English faculty felt equipped to teach writing, and sixty-five percent agreed that poor student writing is a problem. These results are not surprising since English faculty are trained in this area, and it's perceived to be their job to teach students how to become better writers. However, the fact still remains that sixty-five percent of English faculty felt poor student writing is a problem. Again, this is not surprising since eighty percent of students at Union County College test into at least one or more developmental courses in their freshmen year, and as faculty, we can not expect our students to be exceptional writer even after they have passed standardized exams, and freshman composition. Writing is a process, and becoming a good writer takes a lot of time and practice.

Only thirty-five percent of non-English faculty felt equipped to teach writing; however, I must add that some faculty in other disciplines may have very traditional notions of what it means to teach writing even if they know that there is a difference between teaching writing and using writing They may feel that teaching writing means having extensive knowledge about the rules of grammar and a familiarity with composition theory. However, assigning a paper and having students do revisions is in fact teaching writing. Eighty-three percent of non-English faculty agreed that poor student writing is a problem in their classes. With such a large percentage among non-English faculty, I feel that it is important for The College to address these issues. How do we get our students to become better writers? Moreover, how can we prepare non-English faculty to teach writing?

Many of the faculty who participated in the survey are interested in addressing these questions. Eighty-one percent of English faculty and sixty-five percent of non-English faculty are interested in finding out more about improving teaching and learning. Moreover, seventy-one percent of non-English faculty and eighty percent of English faculty are willing to share ideas and assignments with colleagues in other fields. These results show that there is a community of faculty at Union County College who is willing to begin a

dialogue where they address the problems of poor student writing and faculty preparedness.

IV. A Model for Writing-Across-the-Curriculum at Union County College

Most successful Writing Across the Curriculum Programs whether they are at two or four year institutions have at least five components which have contributed to their longevity:

1.) writing intensive courses in the disciplines which outline the specific goals of the courses;
2.). faculty workshops where faculty come together to write, and discuss pedagogy;
3.) a committee which overseas the evaluations of writing intensive courses and faculty workshops
4.) a Writing Center which supports faculty efforts to integrate writing into their courses;
5.) a newsletter which can communicate/share the successes of WAC with the faculty and the college community.

In the past, Union County College had at least three of these components; however, in order to reinstitutionalize WAC at Union County College, all five components have to maximized to their fullest capacity. For example, the goals and objectives of writing intensive courses need to be specific for faculty in the Faculty Handbook, and at workshops, so faculty can begin to think about how to either construct writing intensive courses for existing courses or so they can develop new courses which are writing intensive.

Moreover, the goals and objectives need to be specific for students in the Student Handbook and on the syllabus so students can know what is expected of them in these courses. Any writing intensive courses should be guided by these 5 basis principles:

1. Students should do a significant amount of writing where they are writing a minimum of 2500 words per semester.
2. Writing should be spread out across the semester. For example:
    a. Have students write several short papers or perhaps a short exercise every week.
    b. Have students write a term paper by turning in draft sections at intervals across the semester.
    c. Have students summarize a lecture, a reading assignment, write a personal response, write a lab exercise, or write a series of questions of their own about the course material.
3. Faculty should provide some instruction in writing. This could take shape in several ways:
    a. Handout and review checklists that set forth the instructor's expectations for writing in the course.
    b. Handout and review sample essays.
    c. Discuss with students the kinds of writing done in the discipline.
    d. Ask students to revise and resubmit papers.
4. Faculty should provide timely responses to student writing. Responses to student essays are most useful when they address communication rather than mechanics. In the essays, identify where communication has gone well or badly.
5. Student writing should be a factor in determining the final grade for the course

There should also be three faculty workshops held during the year. Faculty should be encourage to attend these workshops, particularly summer

workshops, before teaching a writing-intensive course. The overall goal of the workshops is for faculty to take something back to the classroom in the fall or spring semester. More specifically though, the summer workshops can be designed with at least five goals. The first goal is to introduce faculty to the philosophy of WAC because some of the faculty may not be familiar with this, and usually faculty are more willing to participate in projects and support a movement if they are educated in its philosophy. The second goal would be to share ideas on what constitutes exemplary writing across the disciplines. Even though there may be differences in this area across and perhaps even within disciplines, it is important that we begin a dialogue if we are to move towards a standardized criteria in this area. The third goal of the workshops would be to have faculty write together, and perhaps peer review each other's work. While peer review can be optional, I believe it is essential for faculty to spend more time writing together and sharing the results of this experience with each other. The fourth goal of the summer workshops would be to discuss strategies for responding to student writing, and this goal can be accomplished with some discussion on the literature in this area and with some of the English faculty offering suggestions. The fifth goal would be to have faculty design a writing intensive courses. To do this, they would need

to explore some very general questions which can be applied to any course at any level across the disciplines. These questions are:

1. What are the goals of the course?
2. What kinds of writing and how much will the course require?
3. How will writing assignments be integrated into the subject matter of the course?
4. Does the nature of the course favor certain kinds of writing assignments?
5. In what way(s) will students learn how to write better or receive instruction in writing?
6. How will students writing be evaluated?

This are just a few of the basis questions faculty can begin to think about as they are developing writing intensive courses. However, it will be up to them to decide what specific assignments will work best for the courses they will teach.

Midsemester workshops can focus on concerns faculty may have about grading or responding to students writing. However, a major focus should be on sharing their successes (or difficulties) with assignments they have given to students as well as discussing successes (or difficulties) with student essays. With faculty permission, some of the writing assignments they have assigned can be submitted to the WAC Newsletter as a way to offer ideas to other faculty in their disciplines.

A Writing-Across-the-Curriculum Committee is also important to the success of WAC at Union County College. It will be responsible for organizing three yearly workshop, designing student and faculty surveys for writing intensive courses, reporting the results of the survey in the WAC Newsletter, and designing and distributing the WAC Newsletter to faculty twice a year.

Since Union County College has an Academic Learning Center on all campuses, it is important for faculty to encourage students to take advantages of these facilities. The ALC has trained writing tutors who can help students at any stage of the writing process. Of course, teaching a writing intensive class will be a lot work for faculty, but those students whose writing is most problematic can be referred to the ALC to work with a tutor. Tutors can be a bridge between faculty and students, helping students to communicate more effectively and thereby supporting faculty in their efforts to integrate writing into their courses.

The WAC Newsletter will be instrumental in disseminating ideas to the faculty. This can be published at the end of each semester, reporting the results from faculty and student surveys. Also faculty can submit writing assignments they have used for their courses. The newsletter can announce

workshop dates and topics to be discussed, as well as announce upcoming local and national conferences on writing.

V. Conclusion

Writing-Across-the-Curriculum at Union County College has the potential for success and longevity if we commit ourselves to teaching writing intensive courses and commit ourselves to the follow-up activities outlined in this paper. When I first began this project, I wanted to find out if there were faculty at Union County College who would be interested in committing themselves to this kind of work. Certainly, the surveys that I distributed to the faculty has shown that there is a community at UCC who is interested in using writing in their courses and teaching students to become better writer. If we want to prepare our students for careers or for advanced degrees at four year institutions where, in either arena, they will be asked to express themselves in writing, then we need to move in this direction. This will not be an easy task, but Writing-Across-the-Curriculum can certainly be a start.

Appendix 1

Faculty Survey: Results

Total results from 62 faculty members: Full-time - 37; Part-Time 25

1. Writing should be taught in any and all classes.
67% Agree 26% Disagree 5% Don't know 2% No Answer

2. Writing in my class would be time well spent.
81% Agree 11% Disagree 6% Don't know 2% No answer

3. There is a difference between using writing and teaching writing.
82% Agree 5% Disagree 10% Don't know 3% No answer

4. I do feel equipped to teach writing.
63% Agree 24% Disagree 13% Don't know

5. Writing is applicable to my field of instruction.
93% Agree 5% Disagree 2% No Answer

6. Poor student writing is a problem in my classes.
76% Agree 16% Disagree 3% Don't know 3% Sort of 2% No Answer

7. I would be interested in finding out more about using writing to improve teaching and learning.
72% Yes 13% No 15% Maybe

8. I would be willing to share ideas and assignments with colleagues in other fields.
74% Yes 6% No 20% Maybe

Appendix 2

Faculty Survey: Results 2

28 = English (13 full-time; 15 part-time)
34 = non-English (24 full-time; 10 part-time)

1. Writing should be taught in any and all classes.

English: 80% Agree 20% Disagree
non-English: 58% Agree 30% Disagree 9% Don't know 3% No Answer

2. Writing in my class would be time well spent.

English: 96% Agree 4% Disagree
non-English: 69% Agree 17% Disagree 11% Don't know 3% No Answer

3. There is a difference between using writing and teaching writing.

English: 81% Agree 8% Disagree 3% Don't know 8% No Answer
non-English: 82% Agree 3% Disagree 15% Don't know

4. I do feel equipped to teach writing.
English: 96% Agree 4% Disagree
non-English: 35% Agree 41% Disagree 24% Don't know

5. Writing is applicable to my field of instruction.
English: 100% Agree
non-English: 88% Agree 9% Disagree 3% No Answer

6. Poor student writing is a problem in my classes.
English: 65% Agree 24% Disagree 8% Sort of 3% No Answer
nonEng: 83% Agree 9% Disagree 3% Sort of 5% Don't know

APPENDIX 2 (cont')

Faculty Survey: Results 2 cont'

7. I would be interested in finding out more about using writing to improve teaching and learning.

English:	81% Yes	11% No	8% Maybe
non-English:	65% Yes	15% No	20% Maybe

8. I would be willing to share ideas and assignments with colleagues in other fields.

English:	80% Yes	20% Maybe	
non-English:	71% Yes	17% Maybe	12% No

By Departments:

English: 28	Physics: 2	Math: 8	Psy/Soc: 5
Chemistry: 4	Nursing: 2	Business: 7	
Biology: 4	Continuing Ed: 1	History: 1	